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# A PIMA–MARICOPA CEREMONY

By HERBERT BROWN

The Harvest or Corn festival of the Pima and the Maricopa Indians, known to them as *Pas-seech*, or Wild Pastime, is no longer observed by them, nor do I know that it has been observed for the last twenty-five or thirty years. Although known as a harvest festival it was indulged in on all important occasions to the extent of one or more times a year. Any event of note in tribal life was generally so celebrated — an abundant harvest; a successful raid against the Apache; the killing of any of the many predatory bands of renegade Indians which at that time infested almost all sections of the country. Whatever the occasion, the festival was the signal for a great gathering. I was told that at one time there were no fewer than 4,000 Indians present — Pima, Maricopa, and Papago. I can not now recall the reason for the celebration and my notes fail to aid me in the matter.

These celebrations invariably took place in the mesquite forest north of the old Casa Grande ruins, south of the village of Blackwater on the Gila. A circle of ground, some half an acre in extent, was cleared of underbrush and logs. A ridge of loose earth eight or ten inches high marked the exterior boundary of the circle. Near the center of the circle was a great heap of dry wood from which a fire, in the center, was kept continually burning. At a sufficient distance from the pile of wood a trench, about 8 feet long, 6 feet wide, and 4 feet deep, was dug for the accomodation of the musicians, some six in number, three of whom beat drums and three rasped the bottoms of upturned flattish baskets upon which had been spread a layer of wax, an exudation from the mesquite. This when rubbed with a bone produced a sound somewhat between a squawk and a shriek. The drums were made of cottonwood logs carefully burned out, over each end of which was stretched a piece of half-tanned deerskin. The musicians kept time to a tune that

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varied only according to the intensity of the requirements; they were in place and at work some time before the performance commenced. At a given signal the music stopped and two of the tallest and most athletic young Indians walked into the ring. They were naked save for a strip or thong of buckskin about the loins which was used for the purpose of binding to them wooden phalli. These instruments were about six or seven inches long and so bound that they stood erect from the bodies of the wearers. Each man in his right hand carried a large stone phallus, twelve or fourteen inches in length; the left hands were pressed tightly against their buttocks. Each took a position at the opposite end of the trench in which the musicians sat. After regarding each other for a time, the one nearest the fire said, "We are here." The other made answer, "Why are we here?" The first replied, "You will learn soon." Each then planted the stone phallus in an upright position at his feet and sprang out of the circle.[1]

On his reappearance each man carried in his right hand a slender stick, about four feet long, tipped with feathers of the wild turkey. They were immediately followed by nine other young men, all naked as the leaders and with wooden phalli bound against their bodies, but differing from the latter in having their bodies painted in alternate stripes of black and white. The leaders raised their wands and kept time with the music, which had recommenced on their return, and all sang in that low tone peculiar to Indians. With one in the lead the other ten danced in pairs. After circling the fire several times, the last pair dropped out and squatted in a half sitting posture near one of the stone phalli. At each successive turn two more would be similarly seated, six circling one emblem and five the other. At the appointed time the sixth man sprang erect with a yell and stood behind the musicians, which place and position he occupied during the remainder of the ceremonies. The other ten sprang erect in pairs, that is one from each group, and as they met they went through the various forms of men and animals in the act —

[1] Interesting in this connection is the finding by the Hemenway Expedition in the prehistoric pueblo ruins of the Salado valley, within the Pima country in southern Arizona, in 1887–88, of several phalli, usually of tufa, although not so large as those here described. — EDITOR.

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of copulation. This was continued, for probably half an hour or more, to the delight and approval of the interested mass of half-naked humanity that packed the outer edge of the circle. The actors then disappeared as suddenly as they had come, with the exception of the man standing erect behind the musicians. In a few minutes they again returned, minus the wooden phalli but naked as before except for a strip of buckskin or of trader's calico thrown across the shoulders. The two leaders continued to keep time with their feather-tipped sticks; while the other eight gathered handfuls of earth and threw it on one another, all the time singing and dancing around the fire, then jumped through the blazing mass, circled, and danced again. This last performance however was more of a run than a dance, and more of a yell than a song. It was repeated five or six times. At the end of the last round the two leaders separated and stood each by one of the two stone phalli. After regarding each other for a few moments in silence, they seized the two emblems and ran out of the ring. The other eight followed in single file, hopping one after the other in toad-like fashion. As they passed, the man standing behind the musicians threw a double handful of earth on each. He then disappeared. After this all who wished passed into the circle and danced as long as they pleased.

YUMA,
ARIZONA.